

Cambridge Redevelopment Authority

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SUMMARY MINUTES

Date of Meeting: March 26, 2014
Meeting: CRA Community Forum
Subject: Strategic Planning Process
Attendees: Sign-in Sheet attached

The meeting opened with a brief presentation about the Cambridge Community Development's Strategic Planning process. Participants asked some questions of clarification as follows:

- What are the powers of the CRA?
 - *The powers of the CRA are defined in Chapter 121b, but as presented, we have seen that redevelopment authorities employ a wide variety of approaches, ranging from preservation, to property management, to economic development*
- What is the role the CRA will play with Volpe? Can the federal government overrule local land use regulations?
 - *The Volpe parcel was historically part of the Kendall Square Urban Renewal Area (URA), but when the decision was made to extend the timeframe of the URA this parcel was not included. The CRA is willing to be involved if this is useful to the redevelopment process.*
- How do you balance your mission statement with the CRA's history of development?
 - *The CRA has a new board, new staff, and a new mission statement.*
- What are your current assets and expectations of future cash flows?
 - *Approximately \$12 million*
- Do you receive state or federal funding?
 - *The federal and state government no longer funds redevelopment authorities as they did in the past; the CRA can apply for competitive grants and other funding programs, similar to a municipal agency or a non-profit organization.*
- Are you concerned about the lack of a master plan? There are general concerns about the lack of a master plan, evolution of the Authority, past plans to destroy Riverside and Cambridgeport, emphasis on Harvard/MIT role—without MIT, KSURP wouldn't have happened.
 - *The City of Cambridge Department of Community Development is responsible for overall planning. The role of the CRA is to help implement those plans. The past plans for Riverside and Cambridgeport were prepared almost 60 years ago at a time when that approach was commonplace in cities across the country – this is not the approach of the current CRA Board. The CRA recognizes the role of MIT and Harvard within the City of Cambridge.*

During the working session, participants were asked to consider ten different projects that a variety of sources have suggested for CRA involvement. Summary sheets for each project were handed out and discussions were held in small groups at each table. The question was to discuss the relative alignment of each project with the CRA's mission, public interest, and financial considerations, which mirrors questions that the CRA itself would be asking.

After the working session, an open discussion was held and the following comments were made:

- Will you reach out to groups that protect low and middle-income residents, specifically the Alliance of Cambridge Tenants? Also, don't forget to include the Neighborhood Association of East Cambridge.
- Webster Avenue might not be highest and best use, but it does provide some use, and a type of jobs that are increasingly scarce in Cambridge.
- Figure out the gap in the need for the city to create housing for low-mid income residents. Why isn't this need being met? Can't you all figure this out?
- Hard to say without a better understanding of how CRA would be formally involved in each project. Maybe a smaller effort to build confidence would be good.
- Like to focus on underutilization of Alewife. Are there ways for the CRA to make it more pedestrian oriented?
- Would like the CRA to get involved with Webster Avenue —it would be beneficial if they could make it 100% affordable housing.
- Not sure of specific projects, but would want the CRA to use whatever leverage exists in their "broad powers" to help the city's resources go further.
- Don't worry about McGrath/1st Street. These properties are of such high value that they will take care of themselves (same with Webster). Projects like the Foundry need public assistance that the CRA could provide. Green space on Cambridge Street would be lovely, but do things that benefit people over land, "towards the less advantaged."
- You could have used your time more efficiently. The meeting was going great until the papers got handed out.
- Housing is critical. The subways are critical.
- Grand Junction Pathway is a priority. I live in Wellington-Harrington, don't own a car, and want to be able to move safely through the city on my bike.
- Also support Grand Junction Pathway—we need a more walkable city with more places to exercise.
- Does the CRA have the power to alter tax arrangements to affect development? A visible hand is much quicker and more efficient. Tax arrangements can be key.
- Improve the bike path on the Charles River.
- Historical interlude: Wellington-Harrington and Walden Square were target housing done under 121A. Three takeaways: City has made enormous contribution to low-income housing. Target middle income. Foundry analysis lacks context, which the CRA could provide. What about the

adjacent surface parking lots? Vail Court should also be looked at with its surrounding context, which also involves a large surface parking lot.

- Affordable Housing Trust Fund is doing a survey to see what people want from housing. Will middle income people want to jump through the necessary hoops of forms and limited equity restrictions?
- Another power not yet mentioned: If there is a place where the problem is land assembly, the way to take scary out of the eminent domain is to delegate power of eminent domain to a local group (as they did with the Dudley Street Neighborhood, Inc.) or to set up a land trust
- Mediation! The CRA can be a meditative force, particularly with the courthouse. The CRA might have the reputation to do that now.
- I don't really believe in the quality of dialogue on CoUrbanize. It's anonymous and you don't know who is lurking. This has been a very good meeting and I don't want this face to face dialogue to be replaced by the internet.
 - *In order to comment on CoUrbanize, one must sign up using a real name. If participants see inappropriate comments, they can be flagged and will be removed directly.*
- Has anyone been taking notes?
 - *The meeting has been recorded and notes have been recorded.*
- Underrepresentation of lower-income people at this meeting. Go meet people in their own space!

Notes recorded by Chris Colley of the CRA, March 26, 2014